

S-E-C-R-E-T

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

5 December 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: YEMEN

SUMMARY

No military solution in Yemen appears likely. If Nasser does not withdraw something approaching the 5,000 troops he has agreed to pull out by 4 January 1964, the chances are better than even that Faysal will refuse any extension of United Nations Yemen Observations Mission (UNYOM) and resume aid to the royalists. In this case, Nasser would be strongly tempted to renew air attacks on Saudi supply bases. How far he goes in doing so will depend to a large extent on how he regards US policies and presence in the area. We think that he would confine himself to sporadic air strikes, if he thought more intensive action would lead to a serious military confrontation, with the US. Continuing military strikes by the UAR into Saudi Arabia would cause Faysal serious domestic difficulties, but we believe it would take several months of this sort of attack for his position to become critical.

GROUP 1  
Excluded from automatic  
downgrading and  
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1. Fighting in Yemen has been at a very low level for some months now, with neither Egyptians nor royalists taking much initiative. Saudi Arabia continues to respect its side of the disengagement agreement and while it has stockpiled arms and ammunition near the border, it has not resumed shipments to the royalist forces. Although about 1,200 troops were pulled out at the end of November, the UAR continues to maintain about 30,000 troops in Yemen, as it has for the past nine months or so.\* Completion of the Soviet-built airfield near San'a and improvements in command and communications arrangements have bettered the UAR's military position to some degree. However, the Egyptians remain unable to penetrate the mountain areas or break the guerrilla fighting abilities of the northern tribes.

2. The Sallal government, backed by Egyptian arms and money, has managed to stay in office and to maintain rudimentary law and order in the southern and western half of the country.

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\* These consist of the following ground forces:  
9 infantry brigades and elements of 2 others  
2 paratroop battalions  
3 commando battalions  
1 to 2 tank battalions  
1 to 2 armored infantry battalions.  
In addition there are about a dozen IL-28s and a squadron or more of MIG-15s and MIG-17s.

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which have been largely unaffected by the fighting. Yemeni political figures are still making efforts to broaden the base of the regime but have made no substantial progress, chiefly because of Cairo's unwillingness to sanction significant changes and because of a disinclination on the part of Yemenis to make moves which might incur Egyptian reprisals. There is among Yemenis, a growing dislike of Egyptian heavy-handedness, even among those who support the republic. In our opinion, a political settlement which is broadly acceptable within Yemen cannot be achieved without a drastic reduction of Egyptian influence and presence, and the formation of a new government which, though not royalist, would give more weight to the tribal elements in the society.

3. Nasser apparently does not share this view and seems still to hope for a more "modern" regime, subservient to his guidance though certainly not politically linked to the UAR. We are fairly certain that Nasser would like to reduce his commitments in Yemen and lessen the burdens his activity in that country places on him. However, he does not see how to do so without risking losses which he considers unacceptable. He recognizes, on the one hand, that a rapid withdrawal of UAR

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forces would probably lead to the collapse of the Sallal regime and result in virtual chaos in Yemen. On the other hand, he apparently fears that a broadened government might turn against the Egyptians. As a consequence he has tended to stand pat and avoid risky moves, and probably hopes that time will solve his dilemma.

4. However, the relative quiet in Yemen is largely dependent on the continuance of UNYOM, and its present mandate is due to expire on 4 January 1964. Nasser has said he will withdraw 5,000 men by that date. He claimed to have made net withdrawals of 6,000 men by the end of October 1963, but we do not accept this as accurate, and believe there had been no net withdrawals up to that time. The UAR has pulled out about 1,200 men (and told UNYOM that it was 1,500) and may bring back enough more by the end of December to make it difficult to make a convincing charge that he has not complied with his promise. If Nasser should fulfill his promise to make a net withdrawal of 5,000 by 4 January, there is a fair chance that Faysal will agree to prolong UNYOM. Much would depend on US actions, for Faysal would rely on the US to procure further UAR withdrawals and would want the continuation of hardsurface as a symbol of the US commitment to Saudi Arabia.

5. If there are no further substantial net withdrawals by 4 January the chances are better than even that Faysal will refuse to agree to a continuation of UNYOM and will renew aid

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to the royalists. Although he may not renew it immediately, Nasser would almost certainly accuse him of so doing. Faysal and the royalists would be likely to try to get support from the British, the pro-royalists in the Aden territories, and the French, and would probably obtain at least some covert help. There have already been harassments of the Egyptians from the Aden area and rumors of the involvement of French and ex-Katanga mercenaries. The association of these elements with Saudi Arabia and the royalists would benefit Nasser if the Yemen issue came to the UN.

6. In the event of renewed Saudi aid to the royalists, the following paragraph from SNIE 36.7-63, 6 November 1963, remains relevant:

Should the Saudis resume active support of the royalists, Nasser would be strongly tempted to strike at Saudi Arabia either by renewed air attacks on supply bases, or perhaps by intensifying subversive activities against Crown Prince Faysal. We have little information as to the assets Cairo has within Saudi Arabia but doubt that they are capable at present of upsetting the regime. The chances of Nasser's striking militarily at Saudi Arabia will depend to a large extent on US policies and presence in the area. If Cairo believes that such action would result in a US-UAR military confrontation, UAR forces are unlikely to strike much beyond the Saudi-Yemen border. This situation would seriously strain US-UAR relations but would probably reinforce Nasser's feeling that he must find a way out of the Yemen imbroglio.

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7. Should the UAR make continuing air strikes in Saudi Arabia or seize significant areas near the Yemen-Saudi border, Faysal would soon find himself in difficulties domestically. However, we believe he has sufficient support in the country and control over its military and security forces to remain in power for six months or so at the least. Heavy UAR attacks, such as bombing raids on major towns and cities, if continued go unchallenged for an extended period, would cause widespread unrest in the cities and would probably lead to severe political instability, seriously threatening the Saudi monarchy.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



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SHERMAN KENT  
Chairman

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OPTIONAL FORM NO. 10

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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

**SECRET**

# Memorandum

TO : The Director

DATE: 6 December 1963

FROM : AD/NE

SUBJECT:

1. The attached Memorandum was prepared at your request, and has been coordinated with representatives of DD/P and OCI.

2. The Board of Estimates does not believe that there is enough new information or changed judgment to justify coordinating a "Memorandum to Holders" of the previous Yemen estimate. It does recommend that you authorize distribution of the attached Memorandum to USIB members and others, for information.

SHERMAN KENT

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